

7-039

2003 - Agim Smajli
Human Rights

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David Blumkett

Home Secretary
50 Queen Annes Gate
London SW1H 9AT

RE: AGIM SMAJLI and dependents Home Office ref: S890226 KOSOVO ROMA

Dear Mr Blunket,

I am a journalist (now retired) by profession and am the co-author of **Destiny of Europe's Gypsies**, published by Chatto & Heinemann in 1972, available in eight languages and regarded as the standard work on the Nazi persecution of Roma. From 1971 to 1981 I was general-secretary of the World Romani Congress and International Romani Union. In 1984 I acted as a consultant with the US Department of Justice in the Artukovic case. My second language is Romanes and I speak Serbian.

I have visited most parts of Kosovo, including Pristina, Mitrovica, Pec, Urosevac, Gjilana, Kacanik, Prizren and Gracanica. I was involved, together with the late Said Balic (president of the IRU) in the formation of Romani organizations in Kosovo.

I have talked to Mr Agim Smajli and find that he has a knowledge of Romanes and speaks Serbian. I am convinced from his appearance, from his use of Romanes and from what he has told me about his connections with the Romani community in Mitrovica that he is a Rom.

As to the danger he and his family would face if returned to Kosovo, against their will, there is considerable evidence that the security situation in the region, from the point of view of the Romani and Serbian minorities, has deteriorated in recent months.

I would presume that the Home Office is aware, from its own sources, that the small-scale programmes which were being pursued for the "safe return" of Roma are now on hold. As secretary of the Trans-European Roma Federation, I have been involved over the past two months with the plight of the 700 Kosovo Roma refugees encamped on the Macedonian Greek border at Medzitlija.

In answer to the Macedonian Government and UNHCR, the UN Administrator Mr Michael Steiner has said categorically that the province is not safe for the return of Roma, and that he cannot guarantee their security.

A conference called by the OSCE is taking place in Skopje on the 24 and 25 July to try to find a solution for the Kosovo Roma refugees. We are awaiting the outcome of this, including any fresh light it may throw on the future prospects of the refugees.

Meanwhile, the two main factors mitigating against the return of Kosovo Roma refugees, like Mr Smajli and his family, are the expected declaration of an independent Republic by ethnic Albanians and the formation of the militia known as the Albanian National Army or "new army". Our sources are telling us that such a declaration could come before the end of this year and is causing heightened tension and re-newed effort by armed groups to "rid" Kosovo of its remaining Roma and Serbs.

As to the new militia, reports say that it is at present most active in western Kosovo, in the areas of Pec and Djakovica but is expanding its operations. It is said that on highways in this region KFOR patrols regularly disappear from sight at nightfall and are replaced by ANA roadblocks. Vehicles are stopped and warnings given to any Roma to "leave or be killed" (Serbs are treated in the same way). In addition, armed men are visiting the homes of Roma giving them the same dire warning. This is resulting in a fresh exodus of Roma from Kosovo.

In Mirovica, the entire Romani quarter has been destroyed and no Roma have been able to return there. Mr. Smajli had a home on the fringes of the city and, in my opinion, such homes are now especially vulnerable.

Another Kosovo Rom (name is withheld) who was forcibly removed from the UK to Pristina a few months ago says on getting to his home in a village near Mitrovica he found the house trashed. Soon after arrival he was threatened by neighbours and within 12 hours had to flee again. He crossed into Macedonia and eventually found his way back to the UK.

Taking these circumstances into consideration, I urge that you allow Mr Smajli and his family to remain in this country.

Yours sincerely

Grattan Puxon

David Blunkett
Home Secretary
Home Office,
50 Queen Annes Gate,
London SW1H 9AT

Dear Mr Blunkett

Re: Agim Smajli and dependents Home office ref: S890226

The Smajli family are Kosovan Roma who would face discrimination and persecution in Kosovo because of their ethnicity. Mr Smajli has an ID card which states he is Roma and has the physical appearance of the Roma people with dark skin and hair which marks him immediately as different from most Kosovar Albanians. His children also have dark skin and hair.

The family are supported by many professionals in this country. C. Tournay, the vicar of St Peter's Brockley states some of the reasons the church is supporting them ;

- They have been in this country for five and a half years.
- The younger children know no other home than the UK.
- To return to Kosovo means they would be displaced again after they have settled into life here.
- The children are integrated into local schools , are doing well here and are preparing to take exams, move into secondary schools or engage in further education. The children are supported by teachers and other professionals in their schools who are impressed with their hard work and attempts to integrate into British society.
- The two eldest children have NI numbers and are able and eager to work in the UK. The eldest girl has been offered a job as a dental technician.
- The five eldest children are girls and their parents are fearful they will be raped should they return to Kosovo as sexual violence was a well known feature of the conflict there and still is a common occurrence especially in racially motivated violence.
- The father suffers from a rheumatoid condition and requires treatment which he is receiving here.
- The Roma are excluded from basic medical care in Kosovo.
- The family have formed strong friendships with people here and have integrated into the community in this country.

The situation for Roma in Kosovo is very dangerous. The family could be subject to violence and discrimination should they be deported. For this and the above reasons I urge you to allow the family to stay in the UK.

Yours sincerely,

Name:

Address:

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..... Post Code: Country:

=====N:
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The Smajli Family Must Stay

The Smajli family are Roma from Kosovo who are facing deportation because the home office do not accept, despite good evidence, that they are Roma. If they are deported to Kosovo they face discrimination and even violence as the situation for Roma there since the end of the war is unsafe. The family have 6 children five of whom are girls and they are afraid that the girls would be subject to sexual violence in addition to other forms of discrimination and persecution.

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What you can do to help

1. Fax/write to the Home Secretary David Blunkett, using the model letter 'Attached', which you can copy/amend/write your own. Fax no: 020 7273 3965